DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 144 629 JC 770 440

AUTHOR Friedlander, Jack
TITLE The History Curriculum in Community Colleges.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American History; Area Studies; Articulation (Program); Community Colleges; *Course Content; History; *History Instruction; Humanities; Humanities Instruction; *Junior Colleges; *National Surveys; Social Studies; *State of the Art Reviews; Western Civilization

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the decline of history curriculum in the community college, the author compared the types of history courses offered and their frequency (class sections), the relationship of offerings to all other humanities studies, and the strength of areas within history. A subsample of 182 institutions was drawn from a 15% national sample of all two-year colleges. Class schedules were examined for spring 1975 and spring 1977. It was found that history comprised 20% of all humanities courses and 23% of all class sections in both years. Of these, U.S. history and western civilization courses totaled 64%, and 83% of class sections. There was a 4% decline in "other world region" courses, and a 2% increase in social and special groups offerings. Seventy percent of the colleges offered only U.S. and western/world civilization courses. The study concludes that history curriculum is primarily influenced by the articulation policies of senior institutions, and that little effort is being made to serve any but transfer students. (RT)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED144629

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jack Friedlander

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

The History Curriculum in Community Colleges

by

Jack Friedlander

Center for the Study of Community Colleges

JC 770 440

The History Curriculum in Community Colleges

Many reasons have been advanced to account for the relative decline of history in the curriculum of secondary and postsecondary schools in America. Among the most common factors cited for the growing lack of interest shown by students in history have been the elimination of history requirements as well as a

> . . . change in students' attitudes toward a tendency to regard history as irrelevant and to desire more practical courses; increased interest in other social science fields; current trend toward careerism and more practical or immediately relevant subjects. Competition from new areas such as ethnic studies and urban studies . . . and a redirection of interest to the psychological, sociological, anthropological areas in an age when "coping" as an individual in society has received great stress (Kirkendall, 1975, p. 568).

Provided with information that enrollments in history have not kept pace with total college enrollments (AHA Newsletter, 1974), and that the major reasons for this decline have been identified, an important question to ask is: How are history departments responding to the trends which are diverting students from enrolling in their courses? More specifically, how are colleges and universities combatting the growing lack of interest students have in history?

One method of examining how history departments are attempting to respond to student interests and needs is

simply to compare the types of history courses and the frequency (class sections) with which they are offered at two or more points in time for a representative national sample of community and junior colleges. This type of analysis would provide direct answers to such questions as: What history courses have been added to the curriculum? And which areas of history (e.g., western civilization, U.S., state and local) are expanding? Remaining stable? Declining? Data on the types of courses and the frequency with which they are offered can provide history departments with much needed information for recruiting faculty, planning staff development, retooling, and identifying trends in student interests and needs.

The focus of the present study is on the most rapidly growing segment of postsecondary education—the community college. Community colleges attract a diversity of students with varying demographic (e.g., age, SES, cultural background) and academic backgrounds, and educational objectives (e.g., career, vocational, transfer, terminal, non-credit, personal enrichment) as well. These factors present an important challenge to history departments to identify accurately and address the needs of their students effectively. The success of community colleges to expose students to history has important implications for the future viability of the history profession.

Purpose

The purpose of the present study is (a) to examine the types of history courses and the frequency with which they are offered in community colleges at two points in time: spring 1975 and spring 1977; (b) to compare the relative strength of history in relation to all humanities offered in community colleges; and (c) to identify the relative strength of areas within history (e.g., U.S. history, western civilization, state and local history).

Method

Class schedules for spring 1975 and spring 1977 were obtained from a representative national sample of 182 community colleges participating in a nationwide study of the humanities curriculum in the community college supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The 182 colleges that participated in this study represent approximately 85 percent of the larger sample which comprises 15 percent of all colleges listed in the 1976 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory.

Courses and the number of times they were offered (sections) were first counted for each college and then grouped into one of six categories. These categories were: (1) State and Local History; (2) U.S. History; (3) Western/World Civilization Survey courses; (4) Other World Regions History (e.g., Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America);

(5) History of Special Groups (e.g., ethnic groups, women); and (6) Social History (courses dealing with cultural and/or social phenomena such as history of the family and intellectual history). This analysis was performed separately for spring 1975 and spring 1977. In addition, the total number of courses and sections offered in the humanities were computed for the sample. Courses included in the humanities were: art, music, theater history and/or appreciation, cultural anthropology, literature, foreign languages, history, philosophy, political science, and interdisciplinary studies in the humanities.

Results

Strength of History in Humanities Curriculum

One objective of this study was to determine the relative strength of history in relation to total humanities offerings. The data presented in Table 1 reveal that history comprised 20 percent of all courses and 23 percent of all sections offered in the community college humanities curriculum in both spring 1975 and spring 1977. These findings show that history accounts for one-fifth of all humanities offerings and that the relative strength of history courses in the humanities has not changed.

Table 1

History as Percentage of Total Humanities

Courses and Sections Offered in

Spring 1975 and Spring 1977

(182 Colleges)

	Humanities			
	Courses		Sections	
	1975	1977	1975	1977
	(N = 4894)	(N = 5029)	(N = 10429)	(N = 10762)
Total History	20%	20%	22%	22%
	(N = 985)	(N = 1014)	(N = 2316)	(N = 2418)

Types of History Courses Offered

An important objective of this study was to identify the relative strength of areas within the discipline of history (e.g., U.S. history, Western Civilization). The percentage of total history courses and sections represented by each of the subareas for spring 1975 and spring 1977 are reported in Table 2.

The data which appear in Table 2 show that for spring 1977 the history curriculum was mainly comprised of U.S. history courses (36%) and sections (53%), and Western Civilization courses (28%) and sections (30%). Social, Special Groups, and Other World Region history in combination accounted for 28 percent of all courses and 12 percent of all history sections offered in spring 1977. A somewhat surprising finding is the comparatively low position in the history curriculum afforded to geographical regions other than the United States.

Changes in History Offerings between 1975 and 1977

In an effort to detect any trends in history offerings, a comparison of the percentage of courses and sections offered in spring 1975 and spring 1977 for each of the areas examined was conducted. As evidenced in Table 2, the greatest

Table 2

Percentage of Total History Courses and Sections Offered in Spring 1975 and Spring 1977 by Subarea (182 Colleges)[a]

History Area	Courses 1975	Courses 1977	Percent Change	Sections 1975	Sections 1977	Percent Change
State and Local	6	7	+1	5	6	+1
U.S. History	36	36	0	52	53	+1
Western/World Civilization	29	28	-1	30	30	0
Social	10	12	+2	5	5	0
Special Groups	7	9	+2	4	4	0
Other World Regions	11	7	-4	4	3	-1

[a]Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

amount of change which occurred between the two time periods examined was in the Other World Region courses which declined from 11 percent of the history curriculum in 1975 to 7 percent in 1977. The only other changes worth noting were in Social History courses and courses in History of Special Groups, both of which increased 2 percent over 1975.

Distribution of History Courses by College

Another method of examining the strength of areas within history is to look at the percentage of colleges which offer courses in each area. The data presented in Table 3 represent the percentage of community colleges which offered courses in ten areas of history in spring 1977. In order to provide a more diagnostic analysis, the four geographical areas which comprised the Other World Regions category (Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America) were considered separately as were the two types of courses which made up the Special Groups category—History of Women and History of Ethnic Groups.

The most revealing finding to emerge from this analysis was that courses in areas other than U.S. History and Western/World Civilization were virtually ignored by 70 percent or more of this sample of community colleges.

Table 3

Distribution of History Course Offerings

by College: Spring 1977

(Percentage of Community Colleges)

Course Category	Number of Courses Offered		
	None	One	Two or More
State and Local	71	24	6
U.S. History	12	30	58
Western/World Civilization	23	35	42
Social	78	13	9
Ethnic Groups	73	19	4
Women	91	9	-
African	95	6	-
Asian	90	8	3
European	87	11	2
South American	92	7	2

More specifically, the percentage of colleges which did not offer a course in the ten areas considered was as follows: African history (95%); South American history (92%); History of Women (91%); Asian history (90%); European history (87%); Social history (78%); History of Ethnic Groups (73%); State and Local history (71%); Western/World Civilization (23%); and U.S. history (12%).

Discussion

An increasing number of commentators have noted the growing lack of interest shown by students in history. This is evidenced by the decline in history enrollments at a time when the overall population of community colleges has increased (Millington and Pelsinger, 1975). Among the factors identified as having contributed to the decline of history in the community college curriculum are: increased enrollments in career or vocational programs; elimination of history requirements; attractiveness of newer disciplines in the social sciences; and student demands for "practical" and "relevant" courses. Among the potential remedies proposed to reverse this downward trend in history enrollments are: restructuring survey courses; employing innovative instructional techniques, and offering courses that are more closely aligned to student educational needs and interests. Some of the courses that have been suggested as meeting this

last condition are histories relating to the following specialized interests: minority groups, women, the Third World, the city, the environment, human settings (e.g., the family, community, religion, educational or legal institutions), and a current events-in-historical perspective approach concerned with such issues as race, poverty, and war (Hays, 1974; Hammett, Sidman, Longin, and French, 1977).

In light of what has been said, it would seem that the efforts of history departments to broaden their appeal to a wider segment of the student body would be reflected in an increase in the percentage of history courses offered in such areas as ethnic groups, women, the Third World, and social history. However, the findings reported in this study revealed that: (a) there was little or no increase in the percentage of courses or sections offered in any area of the history curriculum; and (b) seventy percent or more of the community colleges in this sample did not offer even one course in areas other than U.S. History and Western/World Civilization during the time period examined. These findings strongly suggest that: (a) the history curriculum of most community colleges is influenced, to a large extent, by the articulation policies of senior institutions which often do not award transfer credit for courses beyond traditional

surveys of U.S. history and Western/World Civilization; and (b) most history departments are doing little to attract students not desiring to transfer to a senior institution (e.g., vocational students, non-credit students, adults of all ages pursuing short-term objectives) to enroll in their courses. This disregard occurs despite the fact that students in the latter group represent the majority of all community college students.

Given the diversity in the educational needs and objectives of community college students and the desire of history departments to increase their enrollments for pedagogical reasons (the value of history) and pragmatic reasons (funding often based on enrollments), the lack of variety found in the types of history courses offered by most colleges seems to contradict the needs of history faculty and the community they are presumably serving. It appears that as long as the history curriculum of community colleges is dictated by the policies of the transfer institutions regarding which courses they will award credit to (this is often limited to a few traditional survey courses), as well as the content and structure of those courses, the seemingly self-defeating practice of ignoring the possible interests of the majority of students who do not plan to transfer will persist. If history departments

desire to strengthen their position in the curriculum, then they will have to become more responsive to the needs of their constituents, the transfer institution being but one. If history departments maintain their policy of catering to only one segment of the student body with restricted course offerings, they will continue to perform a disservice to the students they fail to reach and to the society of which the students are members.

References

American Historians: A bicentennial appraisal, Journal of American History, 1976, 73, 5-20.

Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1976.

Hammett, H.B.; Sidman, C.F.; Longin, T.; and French, H.P. Can the teaching of history survive 1984? The History Teacher, 1977, 10, 229-248.

Hays, S.P. History and the changing university curriculum. The History Teacher, 1974, 8, 64-72.

Kirkendall, R.S. The status of history in the schools. The Journal of American History, 1976, 62, 557-570.

Millington, W.G., and Polsinger, M.G. United States history: the Neanderthal of the community college curriculum. Community College Social Science Quarterly, 1975, 5-6, 130-133.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

NOV 4 1977

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES